

REMARKS OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ISA)
JOHN T. McNAUGHTON, AT THE COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES
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It is a very nostalgic occasion for me, as well as an honor, to be addressing this particular audience, in this setting. It is an occasion for me to try to recall the way the world and the future looked to me when I was sitting with my graduating class where you are sitting now. Much as the world and I have changed since then, I seem to see, now as then, a world of quandaries and dilemmas, of uncertainties and complexities, a world in which our national responsibilities are ill-defined but evidently large, challenged by change and by the designs of hostile powers.

Those of you who are graduating today -- who are about to acquire your own experience and responsibilities in dealing with the world outside the University and outside this nation -- look on the end of this school year, I am sure, with mixed feelings. It so happens that the end of this school year has special significance, and mixed emotions, for me as well, as an official of the Government who is forced to spend a great part of his time worrying about the problems of South Vietnam; for Graduation Days this year mark the end of a season of "teach-ins" on our Vietnam policy.

I may be speaking prematurely; perhaps those of you who missed the National Teach-in in mid-May or the other all-night debates that preceded it are planning to fill the summer vacation with Marches on Washington. But I suspect not. At least, I have the impression that most of the tired debators who closed up the Washington Teach-in in the early morning hours this May had reached a private judgment that their own need to discuss this particular subject all night had been largely satisfied.

For my own part, I am one of the few officials concerned with that area of the world ^{into} which has not had occasion so far this spring to confront an academic audience on these issues. ^{I For my own part,} Like certain others, I was forced by a crisis in the Caribbean to be a drop-out from the Teach-in in Washington. Since this appears to be my last chance, with the term ending, I would like to comment today on two or three of the issues of our involvement in Vietnam that the earlier debates, as I have followed them, have shown to be salient.

First, the phenomenon of the debates themselves deserves a word in retrospect, if they are indeed over. Many of you may have heard the parody by a popular comedian of the valedictory address to his crew by the captain of ^a nuclear submarine, near the end of a six month's cruise. At one point, after a long and rather sentimental summary of their six months under the water together, the captain pauses, takes a deep breath, and reflects: "Looking back on the mutiny" Well, looking back on the Teach-ins . . . It seems clear that one of the feelings they reflected, aside from disagreements over policy, was a suspicion in some academic circles that Government officials were publicly and perhaps even privately over-simplifying issues, ignoring threats and risks and costs, wishing away difficulties and unpromising prospects. This is not to say that the critics themselves were notably conscientious in framing realistic alternatives, in defining their goals, or in facing the risks and the consequences of their proposals. But it is understandable that to someone who thinks hard enough about the problems we face in Southeast Asia to be perplexed by them -- and this is true of some though not all of the critics of our policies --

it does not inspire confidence to hear public statements that may seem to express a simple view of the issues and a rather simple optimism: as public statements by all Governments have a natural tendency to do.

It may be that the Government needs to find a way to communicate specifically with the academic community of scholars and serious students, a channel for dialog in which one can take the time for detailed reasoning and examination of evidence and the consideration of many issues: something comparable to the budget hearings before Congress. Like the budget hearings, any such dialog must be extremely expensive in the time of high Government officials; but there are occasions when it may be justified. It would be I am afraid, flattering to the motives and atmosphere of many of the earlier "teach-ins" to suggest that they were close to being such a channel for real communication and intellectual confrontation. But as Government representatives came to have greater opportunity to present an opposing case -- and in the atmosphere of many of these sessions, the spokesman for the Government position was made acutely aware that he was in the role of a dissenter -- the debates may have served something of this purpose.

What, in the end, was accomplished? Few listeners, no doubt, were converted from one set of firm views on policy to an equally strong belief in the opposing views. But the reactions encountered by one of my colleagues, who participated in several sessions and found himself stimulated and encouraged by them, are revealing. He found cause for congratulating himself in the fact that a number of students from audiences that were, initially, almost uniformly hostile, came up to him after the long discussion to say: "Now, I'm confused." That, he thought, was almost sure to be a notable shift in the direction of wisdom.

The other reaction that was reported to him was that he had "reassured" many members of his audience about Government policy-making -- not by the substance of what he said, because many of them ended up disagreeing with that -- but by the very demonstration that Government officials were using reason on these problems, were doing their best to weigh a multitude of considerations including long-range consequences, and were listening to opposing views.

It seems too bad that such an impression would strike an American audience as in any way surprising or revealing or "reassuring." But perhaps it is necessary from time to time to be franker than most public occasions, with their multiple audiences, will allow about matters of doubt and controversy within the Government. It is nearly always mistaken, and sometimes worryingly so, to imagine that the Government is either monolithic or totally self-assured in matters of the highest import. That certainly applies to the subject of Vietnam, which has come to involve matters of the highest import. Scarcely a question, a doubt, a concern has been raised, I believe, by any critic of the Administration in recent months that had not been endorsed or at least raised for discussion at some point by some participant in the policy-making process within the Administration.

It so happens that the comments I shall be making on the particular questions I shall address are not, so far as I am aware, matters of controversy within Government circles. Without trying in any way to be comprehensive or to sum up the preceding months of discussion, I propose to discuss today several questions which seem to divide, in a rough way, proponents of the Government's policy from its critics.

The first question is: Why are we in South Vietnam? You have heard the President's answer to this on many occasions, including his address at Johns Hopkins on April 7 and his message to Congress on May 4.

First, we are there to keep a promise to the people of South Vietnam. The promise of the United States has been made by three successive Presidents -- Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. The promise, starting with President Eisenhower's letter to Vietnamese President Diem in October 1954 and continuing through President Johnson's statement at Johns Hopkins University has been expressed often, clearly and in constant terms. It would be wrong to break that promise.

Second, we are there to strengthen world order by demonstrating to free people of the world that our word remains and will remain good. The value of the national pledge of the United States -- the credibility of that pledge, not only in Vietnam but as the President said, "from Berlin to Thailand" -- is at stake today in our undertaking behind the Government and people of South Vietnam.

Third, we are there to draw a stop-line to Asian Communist aggression. Since the end of the Second World War, the leaders of what is now North Vietnam have worked to impose a Communist state over all of Vietnam. Their further ambitions extend at least to the remaining parts of former French Indochina -- Laos and Cambodia. Their campaign was accelerated in 1960, about the time that Ho Chi Minh announced at the Third Congress of the North Vietnamese Communist Party the necessity for North Vietnam "to step up the . . . revolution in the South." And close behind the Hanoi regime, supporting it and spurring it on in pursuit of its goals, are the leaders of Communist China. A Free World withdrawal from the challenge in the jungles and mountains of Vietnam would merely transfer the

battle line to other places. How much had to be swallowed up before World War II before we learned that simple lesson?

Finally, we are there on a mission to help South Vietnam -- indeed all of the countries in the area -- to make progress through orderly change. Progress is coming and must come in this changing world. Especially the young people quite properly have great aspirations. Old social structures will be immersed in turbulence. It is for us, with our enormous talents and physical resources, to help men everywhere to find the new course without sacrificing their freedom.

Our objective in South Vietnam is straightforward and easy to state; it is the independence of South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. The President has made clear that 'we will do everything necessary to reach that objective, and we will do only what is absolutely necessary.'

There you have our ends and guidelines.

These points have been made so often that it is hard to believe there is any uncertainty about the Government's answer to this question. The fact that the question continues to be raised indicates that the critics cannot accept the answer as sufficient; they cannot conceive of the stakes I have mentioned as being great enough to justify the over-all magnitude of effort we are making in South Vietnam. That is, in the end, a matter of judgment; I can only say that in my own opinion, these stakes are very high indeed.

I have the feeling that many of those who differ tend to ignore in particular the factor of commitment. They seem to deny the reality of the significance of the commitment of the US Government to the achievement of the objectives I have described, as that commitment has evolved over the last decade and as that commitment is seen from the three perspectives of the South Vietnamese, of the Communist Bloc and especially Communist China, and of all those nations in the world who regard their security as dependent upon any form of US guarantee.

Several speakers at the National Teach-in in May took some pains to describe our commitment to South Vietnam as something quite artificial, fancied and insubstantial, deserving no weight in our present policy-making. That is not the way that Communist China, for one, sees the stakes, and on this point I think we must see eye to eye with the Chicom: the US Government's commitment to the Independence of South Vietnam is real, it is truly being tested -- by the actions of North Vietnam with the support and encouragement of Communist China -- and the outcome of that test is indeed one of the largest stakes at issue.

President Johnson emphasized clearly this factor of history in his remarks accompanying his message to Congress on May 4, requesting additional appropriations for military operations in South Vietnam:

"There are some who sincerely and genuinely feel we ought to be out of Southeast Asia altogether and retire to our own shores, that we really have no great interest there, and that we ought to pull out.

"That argument would have had much more force if we had not concluded otherwise as a policy of the Congress and had not entered into treaties that bound us there."

As the President said in his accompanying message:

"Make no mistake about it. The aim in Viet-Nam is not simply the conquest of the South, tragic as that would be. It is to show that American commitment is worthless."

To write off the impact of such a demonstration upon potential aggressors and their potential victims is to expunge the most important lessons to be learned from the history of the past third of a century.

What, then, of the means by which we are supporting our commitment? Two aspects of our programs, in particular, have raised questions: one is the US and Vietnamese air strikes against selected military targets in North Vietnam; and the other, the deployment of some US combat units to South Vietnam, along with increased support personnel and with the use of US aircraft in direct combat support within South Vietnam. Are these steps appropriate to our ends? Why were they needed, and why at this time?

The President's reluctance to employ these measures until convinced of their absolute necessity hardly needs explanation. Each of them involves Presidential responsibilities of the highest magnitude -- the hazarding of American lives, and the risk of widening a war. Then what produced the conviction of their necessity? To understand this, one must understand the nature of the war in South Vietnam.

It is not another Korean war in which conventional military forces face each other along a battle line. Nor is it another Greece, where

local rebellious dissidents used neighboring areas as sanctuary. We must understand that, while some of the people of South Vietnam are supporting the Viet Cong, the war is not a local rebellion. What is new and different is that, in Vietnam, the techniques of rebellion have been harnessed by a neighbor set on conquest. We are witnessing a method of concealed aggression that the Communists hope to use against vulnerable nations all over the world. To gauge its prospects of success -- to understand the vulnerabilities it exploits and the requirements for combating it -- we must recognize the basic tactics of their approach. That approach aims, in the first instance, not at destroying armed forces or winning control of territory, but at destroying the roots of the existing government and winning control over population.

But is not the success of the insurgents--their very ability to survive and operate and expand--proof of broad popular allegiance to their cause and commitment to their support? Is not the control exercised by the Viet Cong evidence of mass loyalty, perhaps even majority support? These are the questions that underly much of the emotional protest against our involvement. In their rhetorical aspect they reflect a commonly-held, but mistaken, view of insurgency.

The answer to both questions is: No. The fact is that the Viet Cong, in South Vietnam have never been able to rely upon the broad and deep nationalistic appeal that the Viet Minh, in its guise of a genuine Popular Front against a colonial power, enjoyed prior to 1954. But the Communist techniques of rural insurgency, developed by Mao Tse-tung in his twenty-year struggle in China and perfected by Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap in their nine-year fight against the French in Indochina, are designed to operate without such an appeal. Nor do they rely on active disaffection from the central government, though they make use of local grievances. What these techniques do require is a regime in which the central and provincial governments lack an effective presence--in the form of competent representatives, rural programs, police or militia, communications and observers--in the rural countryside. That is a condition that obtains in very large areas of the world today; and it presents the sponsors of insurgency with their chance.

Fundamental to the survival and success of a government -- to its ability to collect taxes, to raise military manpower, to further economic programs, to develop a national spirit of progress -- is its ability to provide physical security for its officials and its citizens. Since the goal of insurgency is to destroy the authority and control of an existing government so as to substitute control by another, the basic step in the Communist technique is to demonstrate the government's inability to provide that physical security.

Beginning in remote, rural areas where the law-enforcement arm of the government is weakest and slowest, there are assassinations and kidnappings. By concentrating on local officials, the terrorists achieve three purposes at once: They dramatize the inability of the central government to protect its own officials, they destroy the government's presence and contact with the rural population in the area, and they demonstrate their own ruthlessness and total commitment -- a lesson that is not lost upon those from whom they demand taxes or labor or information or silence.

As the reputation of their deeds spreads, the guerrillas are able to use local agents relatively openly to collect funds for them, to propagandize, to recruit and to inform on officials, programs, opponents and the movement of government troops. Thus a "shadow" administrative, political arm of the insurgency evolves, protected from betrayal and supported in its demands by the strongarm guerrillas, who are in turn supported and informed by the efforts of these representatives in place. ¶ The analogy to the "protection in the Twenties racket" run by organized gangsters in big cities is very strong. The crime syndicates had both their "collectors" and their "enforcers"; kidnappings and dynamite bombings were cheap and plentiful; and it did not take a strong ideological allegiance to the mob to encourage the restaurant owners and laundrymen to pay their "dues" and to keep their mouths shut to the police.

This is the process that the Hanoi regime called into play in South Vietnam. It is the process that may be beginning now in Thailand, where we have recently witnessed the assassinations of rural officials, simultaneously with bland statements in Peking that Thailand is ripe for insurgency.

In South Vietnam the assassinations began in earnest in mid-1957, and grew steadily through 1959. In 1960, Communist terrorists assassinated or kidnapped over 2000 local officials, and civilians. In 1964, 436 civic officials were murdered -- an average of 36 a month. In many cases their wives and children were murdered with them. In the same year, 1131 civic officials were kidnapped; and aside from civic officials, 1359 South Vietnamese civilians -- government sympathizers, informers, non-cooperators with the VC -- were assassinated and 8423 civilians were kidnapped or captured.

This bleeding and intimidation of the government structure in South Vietnam has gone on for eight years; and it goes on today, brutal and selective as ever. In one month this year, 11 civic officials in the single province of Thua Thien, where the Communists are attempting to eliminate governmental authority. Through May of this year, 756 civilians had been murdered in 1965, including 167 civic officials, 4446 civilians kidnapped, including 388 civic officials.

The rate of terrorism rose sharply to its present level between 1963 and 1964, from about 700 incidents a month through most of 1963 to a range between 1500 and 2000 a month in 1964. Figures like these are as hard to comprehend as national budget totals; but what we are talking about, for a single month, is 2000 separate acts of violence -- assassinations, bombings, kidnappings -- against unarmed civilians.

In the cities, where the Viet Cong does not yet aspire to control, their terrorism has a different, less discriminating character: there, the grenade in the cafe, the bomb in the street, killing women and children randomly, advertises the presence of the VC and creates general anxiety and unrest. But in the countryside, where the VC hopes to eliminate the physical presence of the government and substitute their own control, the terrorism is more sharply focussed on the particular individuals that stand in their way. It is more precise in its targets, but it is no less brutal. Ruthlessness and ferocity are essential to its political effect.

Statistics alone cannot convey the full meaning of this process in what has become the way of life in rural South Vietnam. I have no desire to press on you the repellent details of the incidents that the Government is forced to record in its complaints to the International Control Commission. These reports recount the manner of death of young girls like Phan-thi-Trinh, whose crime was to be Chief of the Republican Youth in Binh-Thanh hamlet, Kien-Hoa Province, and of old men like Dang-thien-Mon, who at 70 was treasurer of the Trung-Hai fishing cooperative in Cat-Son hamlet, Trung-Luong. For their "crimes" these two, like thousands of others, were taken in the night, "sentenced," and executed on the spot by submachine bullets. In typical fashion, the executioners made clear their identity, as a warning to others, by pinning to the girl's body a death sentence signed by the "Forces for the Liberation of South Vietnam." Other bodies, bearing the death sentence of the Forces for the Liberation of the South, are found beheaded or with the throats cut. The families of victims, if they are not killed at the time, may be

pursued. Thus, just two weeks after her husband was shot down by the VC, Mrs. Hoang-thi-Con was knifed in her bed as she slept with her two young daughters. Despite her wounds, she managed to run away for help; but the terrorists' knives left her 11 year-old daughter badly wounded and her 9 year-old daughter dead. It is names and stories like these that you must read into the statistics I have given you -- statistics that tell of 11,000 civilians murdered or kidnapped in 1964, equivalent in terms of US population to far more than 100,000 Americans -- if you are to judge the impact of this terrorism on the will of the rural population to resist the Viet Cong. And yet, remarkably, that will persists, as is demonstrated by the continued willingness of South Vietnamese to accept the village posts that make them targets for attack, or to join the Popular Forces that man village defenses against the night raids of the VC.

What forces are required to combat such organized terror? The rule is commonly heard that government forces need a superiority ratio of 10 or 15 to 1 to master the threat posed by guerrilla forces and terrorists. This partly reflects actual experience in countries where insurgencies have been successfully suppressed -- e.g., Malaya. But it follows directly from the nature of the guerrilla challenge I have described to you.

Provided by North Vietnam with the critical margins of manpower, materiel and direction, the Viet Cong destroy and run, usually at night. They sabotage a railroad bridge, forcing the government to guard them all; they bomb a restaurant, causing all public places to be searched and protected; they assassinate a village chief, overloading the police and making good administrators hard to recruit.

Not only must the government forces tie down troops and police defending the most important people and facilities, but it must have quick reaction forces in regional reserves, if they are to limit the guerrillas to hit-and-run attacks. And, to seek out and destroy an elusive enemy who has no responsibilities to defend territory or people and can choose to evade battle, they must invest massive efforts in searching and encircling operations.

All of this is beyond the reach of a force that outnumbered its opponents only 4 to 1 or less, as the regular and paramilitary forces of South Vietnam do today.

The main force units of the Viet Cong -- their well-trained, well-equipped, full-time regulars in organized combat units -- are now estimated to number from 38-46,000, and their irregular forces 100,000.

These guerrilla forces of 140,000 are too much for the present 565,000 South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary and police forces to handle if they are to provide, as I have indicated they must provide, security for citizens and officials and hamlets throughout the country.

Yet as the government forces expand, infiltration from North Vietnam continues to swell the ranks and provide crucial leadership and technical support of the Viet Cong. Interrogations and documents have so far established the probable infiltration of over 39,000 men since 1959, including 5-8000 last year. Considering the usual time lag between infiltration and this sort of confirmation, we estimate that at least 10,000 infiltrators entered in 1964.

The importance of these infiltrators to the Viet Cong is far out of proportion to their numbers. Most of them have been seasoned guerrilla fighters from the campaign before 1954. They form the great majority

of what the Communists call the "cadre": the organizational and unit leadership, all the way from central and regimental headquarters down to squad level. They extend the chain of discipline from Communist Party and military command headquarters in Hanoi down to the districts and hamlets of South Vietnam. They are the technical experts, the weapons specialists, the key communicators, the propagandists.

The locally-recruited or coerced South Vietnamese in the Viet Cong form the majority of the irregulars, the part-time guerrillas and helpers. But the infiltrators form the majority of the hard core Viet Cong; they are the brains and the backbone of the movement as a whole.

A newer type of infiltrator, swelling the ranks of the main force troops, is the young ethnic North Vietnamese draftee, sent down in units 500-600 strong; these form up to 75% of the infiltrators in 1964. Their appearance makes clear the determination of North Vietnam to maintain the flow of infiltrators despite the drying up of the pool of former South Vietnamese who obeyed the orders of the Viet Minh to move North in 1954. Still further evidence of this intent is the appearance, just recently determined and reported, of a regular combat unit of the North Vietnamese Army, the 2d Battalion of the 101st Regiment, 325th Division, in northwest Kontum Province in South Vietnam.

Another way in which North Vietnam plays a crucial role in the support of the Viet Cong is the supply of arms and ammunition. ~~You may have heard Secretary McNamara's press conference on television on Monday. As he pointed out,~~ over 80% of the weapons requirements of the Viet Cong must be supplied from outside. Capture from government troops -- mostly Popular Forces and regional militia -- has netted the VC only 14,000

weapons over the last four years. The remaining weapons for their 38-46,000 main force troops and for their 100,000 irregulars have had to come from outside South Vietnam. Let me describe the representative mix of weapons captured from one VC main force element on the 5th and 6th of this month. It consisted of one US M1 rifle, four US carbines, two Czech assault rifles, one East German light machine gun, and the rest Chinese Communist weapons, including 72 of their latest rifles and carbines, 11 assault rifles, four light machine guns, two 60mm mortars, three rocket launchers and a 75mm recoilless rifle. Thus, of 101 weapons, 90% of the small arms and all of the heavier weapons were Communist Bloc weapons, nearly all Communist Chinese.

From this picture of the over-all challenge, two conclusions follow: First, it is essential that the manpower balance within South Vietnam be shifted in favor of the government forces. Second, it is essential that the critical flow of personnel, support and direction from North Vietnam be reduced.

The Government of South Vietnam, with our support, is taking a number of steps to redress the manpower imbalance. An increase of 160,000 South Vietnamese regular and paramilitary forces and police is underway. In this connection, the 10,000 recruits to the regular forces in March and the 11,000 recruits in April--both higher than the goals and two-thirds of them volunteers--give encouragement.

With our support, the South Vietnamese are finding ways to "stretch" their manpower--by increased mobility, better communications and logistics support, and close air support. And finally, in answer to one of the questions raised earlier, our deployment of US combat units helps the manpower balance in several ways: by releasing South Vietnamese units from defensive duties for offensive employment, by engaging directly in localized counterinsurgency operations and by providing reserve support to ARVN units. We now have about 9000 Marines at Da Nang and 6000 at Chu Lai; and about 4000 Army airborne troops at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang. By June 10, they will be joined by 900 Australian troops at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang.

To reduce the critical flow of personnel, support and direction from North Vietnam, we have been forced to make attacks on North Vietnam by air. The purposes of the strikes are to slow down the aggression, to give heart to the suffering people of South Vietnam, and to convince the leaders of North Vietnam that the United States will see her commitment through-- that the United States is prepared for a long continued conflict.

You will recall that, in addition to the continuous terrorists assaults on things primarily Vietnamese, the United States had absorbed the October attack at Bien Hoa airfield, that we had absorbed the Christmas eve bombing of the Brinks Hotel in Saigon, and that on February 7 the Viet Cong killed 8 and wounded 133 Americans at the Pleiku base in northern Vietnam.

On that February 7, the US and Vietnamese strikes, against North Vietnamese barracks along the infiltration feeder routes, were carried out in less than 20 hours. Since then, there have been more than 100 strikes on North Vietnamese targets--radar stations, ammunition and supply depots, airfields, barracks, roads, railroad lines, bridges, and so on. The targets have been chosen carefully to avoid civilian damage but to reduce the North Vietnamese capability to infiltrate men and materiel into South Vietnam.

No one believes that the air strikes alone will be sufficient, but along with continued efforts in the South they are essential to a solution. They are essential to cut the flow of supplies. They are essential to convince Hanoi that their efforts in the South cannot succeed--to prove to them for the first time that their acts of aggression do bring danger to them directly and do carry costs. The strikes give the North for the first time a reason to worry, and a reason to quit. By the same token, they give the Viet Cong in the South a reason to worry that the Northerners will quit, a reason to doubt that the long hardships of the guerrilla life must eventually, with outside support, win out.

~~Finally, the strikes confront the Communist Chinese with the new fact that their adventures in the Peninsula~~

In the first week in April there were 129 defections of Viet Cong military personnel and 23 political cadre: the highest weekly number since statistics had started in January, 1964. But the number of defections in following weeks

was even higher, adding to 533 for April. In the last week in May the number was almost as high for a single week: 354 VC military defections.

Finally, the strikes confront the Communist Chinese with the new fact that their adventures in the Peninsula are no longer cheap--their encouragement of the North Vietnamese campaign can involve them in serious risks.

All of these effects should grow with time.

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In South Vietnam the assassinations began in earnest in mid-1957, and grew steadily through 1959. In 1960, Communist terrorists assassinated or kidnapped over 2,000 local officials, and civilians. In 1964, 436 civic officials were murdered -- an average of 36 a month. In many cases their wives and children were murdered with them. In the same year, 1131 civic officials were kidnapped; and aside from civic officials, 1359 South Vietnamese civilians -- government sympathizers, informers, non-cooperators with the VC -- were assassinated and 8423 civilians were kidnapped or captured.

This bleeding and intimidation of the government structure in South Vietnam has gone on for eight years; and it goes on today, brutal and selective as ever. In March of this year, 36 civic officials were murdered, 11 of them in the single province of Thua Thien, where the Communists are attempting to eliminate governmental authority.

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